

**How ENDOW Came to Be? Defining Moments of Foundation and Development**  
**Saturday, April 21, 2012**  
**Women Involved in ENDOW in Minnesota and Wisconsin**

**I. Remote Preparation**

**A. For Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM**

**1979**

**September:** I began a two year sabbatical in Washington DC to write the first volume on The Concept of Woman 750BC-1250AD

**October:** John Paul II came to Washington DC for a Mass on the Mall and a talk at the National Shrine which I attended outdoors in October.

Pope John Paul II began his Wednesday audiences on Theology of the Body introducing concepts such as male and female/ masculine and feminine as "two ways of 'being a body' of the same human being, created 'in the image of God.'" (10/31/79).

He also introduced 'complementarity' in "masculinity and femininity are" two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body. (11/21/79)

Called to be self-gift and to be a communion or communion of persons (12/19/79)

Furthermore he stated that "the mystery of femininity is manifested and revealed completely by means of motherhood... and, likewise, the mystery of man's masculinity, that is, the generative and 'fatherly' meaning of his body, is also thoroughly revealed." (3/12/80)

The discovery of these insights by this Catholic philosopher and pope was a defining moment for me personally, as I went through the arduous work to begin tracing the concept of woman in the history of philosophy. It was as if I knew where I wanted to go. I knew by faith that this was the truth about woman and man.

Returning to Montreal I wrote about his work and taught his philosophy, especially The Acting Person (1979), and began small study groups of his Papal documents and teach his philosophy at Concordia University where I was a professor of Philosophy.

**1983**

In 1983 I entered the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan and in 1984 was sent back to Montreal where Pope John Paul II came for a pilgrimage in September. Mother Barbara Anne, RSM my local religious superior and I began to team-teach in our convent study groups on Pope

5 year ↓  
John Paul II's thought. These were two defining moments of my personal life and subsequent dedication to the Holy Father's thought.

1988  
7 year

**Pope John Paul promulgates his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*** (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year). This document electrified me and I continued to study and teach it. It deepened the meaning of the complementarity of women and men, as equally human, equally persons; significantly different and called into a communion through mutual self-gift, in motherhood, fatherhood, in mutual subjection out of reverence to Christ. Woman is entrusted with the human beings in her realm of activity, and the world awaits future manifestations of women's genius, as she acts through this entrustment by welcoming and fostering the development of those persons entrusted to her, as mother, teacher, doctor, politician, etc.

1995

**March 25: John Paul II Promulgated his Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*** (On the Gospel of Life), which in Par. 99 called for a "new feminism" [what I call a sign of contradiction]. This draws on the feminine genius, through which "women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person." It concludes with the haunting phrase: "This is the fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women. And it is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change." I felt the binding power of this expectation as I continued to work on Volume II of The Concept of Woman (1250-1500).

**June 29: John Paul II's Letter to Women.** Here Pope John Paul II took on the difficulties of exploitation, discrimination, and violence and the suffering of women. It was a clear answer to "old feminism" as well as a way to collaborate with some areas of old feminism in supporting the dignity of women and several aspects of women's liberation, while critiquing those areas that are not in union with the followers of Christ.

**August 29 Mary Ann Glendon named as head of Holy See's Delegation to the Beijing UN Conference on Women.**

1996

**June:** I took early retirement from Concordia University after teaching there from 1969.

1998

**June:** I arrived in Denver, having been assigned by my community at the invitation of Archbishop Chaput, to found a Department of Philosophy for the new seminary opening by establishing a philosophy curriculum with Regis University and the Pontifical Lateran University, hiring sufficient faculty, and teaching full time courses in the department.

## B. For Marilyn Coors

1996

Attended conference in Amecameca, Mexico to study John Paul II's New Feminism in relation to the UN Beijing Conference on Women. Mary Ann Glendon also attended

**Defining moment** when Marilyn Coors forms an exploratory group in Denver to pursue an apostolate in this area.

## C. For Terry Polakovic

2000

Attended with about 10 women the group that Marilyn Coors had begun

2002

Attended a conference in Detroit focusing further on the concept of John Paul II's New Feminism.

February - December: **Defining moment** when Terry consulted with Nancy Walla and Fran Maier about starting an apostolate focused on this concept. Fran Maier (the chancellor presented the idea to Archbishop Chaput who gave his approval and offered complementary space in the Pastoral Center for offices.

December 2002: Betsy Considine held a meeting at her home featuring a talk by Mary Ann Glendon, JD. Sr. Prudence attended.

**Defining moment** when Marilyn, Terry, and Betsy provided funds to begin this apostolate by providing a salary for a director. Terry, who had been director of Seeds of Hope was appointed Director of an apostolate based on the writings of John Paul II's New Feminism and the Feminine Genius.

## II. The Apostolate Begins

2003

**January:** Terry knocks on the door of Sr. Prudence's office in the seminary and asks her: "Will you teach me everything you know about John Paul II's teachings on woman?" The initial answer was, "No I left that behind in Montreal, and now am teaching men." "But I will ask my religious superior before giving a definitive answer." The superior, Sr. Mary Judith O'Brien, RSM said to ask her to come back at the end of academic term if she is still interested. Terry knocked again!

**April: Defining moment of collaboration** among lay women, consecrated women religious, and ordained Archbishop. "The Foundation for the Dignity of Women" was incorporated on May 12, 2003 with legal help from Sr. Mary Judith and Nancy Walla.

**Defining Moment:** The name was changed to ENDOW (Short for Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Woman) on June 20, 2003 after much brainstorming. The decision was made to indicate that the foundation's orientation was educational rather than beginning a new spirituality.

**Defining Moment:** A decision was made that ENDOW was open to women from all spiritualities and charisms approved by the Church.

**Defining Moment Summer:** Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM began to teach a bi-weekly seminar at the Pastoral Center for professional women, students, friends on the philosophy behind John Paul II's teachings. This course had around 40 students over the next 3 years. The documents *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *Evangelium Vitae*, Letter to Women were shared with an informal method. Reading a paragraph out loud, explaining concepts or words not familiar to the group, eliciting responses, and moving on to the next paragraph. It was a simple seminar format, with discussion among those present. No homework. The classes were recorded and transcribed at first.

**September:** Defining moment when a group of college students began a project for high school girls entitled "The Room."

2004

**January:** Defining moment First formal ENDOW Board Meeting to determine: Who is the Endow Audience? Answer "Catholic Adult and Youth Women in the Pew"

**March:** Cardinal Stafford arranges for ENDOW representatives to meet with the Pontifical Council for the Laity

**April:** Bishop Jose Gomez joins the Board and Standing Committees developed (Curriculum, Communications, Finance, Development, and Governance) and a Mission Statement developed "To educate women towards a deeper, more profound understanding of their God-given dignity and vocation as women"

The first study guides and public lectures by ENDOW members begin to be written, given, pilot tested, and promulgated. Collaboration with various faculty members from St. John Vianney Theological Seminary begins so that Endow facilitators can consult with them about particular questions that arise in discussions, lectures, and for proof reading of study guides in advance of the request for an Imprimatur.

The continuing seminary at the Pastoral Center led by Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM starts to go deeper into the background of John Paul II's teaching,



reading Love and Responsibility, and learning about Thomas Aquinas, and phenomenology.

Publicity about ENDOW begins to spread through news networks. Marilyn Coors helps teach the pastoral center ongoing Endow seminars on sections of *The Gospel of Life*.

**September:** Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM leads the first facilitator training. **Defining Moment when 19 pilot ENDOW study groups** begin studying JPPI's *Letter to Women* in Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska for 70 total participants.

2005

**January Defining moment when a Website for ENDOW is opened.** Further study groups, facilitator trainings, and public lectures begin to expand.

Female and male writers are hired to write drafts of further study guides. **Defining moment** when the principles for developing a study guide are established: draft written, editorial team of ENDOW women revise the draft and put it into the ENDOW format of text, side bars with definitions and descriptions, prayers and questions interspersed, for an 8 session course (approximate length), piloted in a few groups, revised after the piloting and then promulgated with Imprimatur.

**Defining moment** when the board decides to only offer ENDOW in a Diocese when the Bishop gives permission for it to be in his diocese.

**Defining moment** when the organization is attacked by false rumors claiming that ENDOW is not a broad Archdiocesan organization open to all women in the Church but rather a front for one or another of its member groups. Some Bishops, who believed these false rumors refuse to have ENDOW in their dioceses.

**Defining moment** when some of the founders and members of the Board of ENDOW meet with Mother Mary Quentin Sheridan, RSM, who had been supportive and inspirational in the founding of ENDOW to ask how to respond to the false rumors and the negative consequences and suffering for ENDOW which they occasioned. Mother Mary Quentin suggested that this was a time for a pilgrimage of the Board of ENDOW to ask from the Holy Spirit what direction the organization should take. She asked Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM to direct the pilgrimage and the decision was made to go to Siena and Rome with this prayer intention.

ENDOW presents at World Youth Day in Germany.

In the summer the Religious Sisters of Mercy in Denver made a visit to Mount Olivet Cemetery, and visited the grave of Julia Greeley, a lay woman and ex slave who many believed was a saint when she died in 1918. Sr. Prudence decided to take information on 'Beloved Julia' to share with the ENDOW board when in Siena as they discussed the live and witness of Catherine of Siena.

**September:** On the pilgrimage many defining moments occurred including the Board responding to Julia Greeley as embodying Pope John Paul II's criteria for the 'genius of women' who pay attention and foster the development of all who come into her range of activity. In addition Fr. Rodriguez offered Mass at the Catacomb of St. Cecilia, Cardinal Stafford offered Mass in the Chapel Crypt of St. Peter's Basilica, and a meeting of the Board with Mother Mary Quentin and Mother Mary at the Domus Guadalupe led to the decision of ENDOW to offer an annual gala so that their husbands could be included in this blossoming association. The Board completed their pilgrimage with a strong confidence about the mission of ENDOW and to carry on the work of **ENDOW moving forward positively** rather than focus on the confusion of negative false claims.

**2006**

**March: ENDOW adds Formal Advisory Board**

**May: Defining Moment when ENDOW holds first fundraising Gala at which the first Julia Greeley Award is given to a woman who is a model of the feminine genius.** The decision was made to not focus on famous women, but rather on ordinary women who in a special way has lived out her feminine genius in the circumstances of her daily life.

More study guides are written, new texts are studied in the Pastoral Center ENDOW on going course, including Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est*; facilitator training now travels to places like Michigan, Indiana, and San Antonio. A facilitator's retreat is offered in Colorado Springs.

**2007**

An ENDOW curriculum for High School Students is written, an ENDOW Spanish-speaking study group is begun.

**September:** A second ENDOW pilgrimage is taken to Germany to walk in the footsteps of Edith Stein and again to ponder the future direction of ENDOW. Sr. Prudence Allen coordinated this pilgrimage with Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell, who had begun writing material for a study guide from

her doctoral dissertation. Those on the pilgrimage stayed in the German convent St. Marienhaus of the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

**By the end of 2007** ENDOW now has 800 women in study groups in several states.

**2008-2012** In the last over four years, the ENDOW Board has struggled with the deep and important question of how to balance the financial costs of the ENDOW program with the promptings of the Holy Spirit for expansion and development.

A defining moment came when we realized that it is impossible to use just a business model which would project  $x$  number of women in year 1,  $x+y$  number of women in year 2 and  $x+y+z$  number of women in year 3, etc. The Holy Spirit is not able to be contained or forced by human projections. At the same time, however, ENDOW has grown by quantum leaps so that this year we have study groups in over 100 dioceses in the United States and Australia, Canada; and New Zealand, with more permissions sought in even other dioceses and countries at the request of women who want to start an ENDOW study group.

Endow will be presenting at the Eucharistic Congress in Ireland in 2012

Over 12,000 women and girls have studied through ENDOW since its inception.. We think that they have discovered the reality that truth persuades by its own gentle power.

2011  
ABC → Photo -  
party gift -  
Jm. di persona -